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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3047
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001476

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: UNEVEN MEDIA COVERAGE OF EMBASSY EVENTS IN
SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER

REF: Ashgabat 1470

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Coverage of Embassy events by state-controlled media was uneven during this two-month period. A state media journalist's questions at a press conference for a visiting commerce delegation in September were an unexpected and positive development. Media accurately highlighted the Embassy's two-week film festival on occasion of Columbus Day. State media gave wide coverage to the opening of the USAID and IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) supported Interactive Multimedia Internet Learning center at the Supreme Council for Science and Technology of Turkmenistan. State TV widely covered the embassy-organized exhibit at the International Book Fair, held on October 8-10. State print outlets accurately highlighted the award ceremony of the winners of grants under the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. Post also saw that perfectly acceptable material about some of our events was never aired. END SUMMARY.

STATE MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS DAS PAUL B. DYCK VISIT

¶3. (U) The September 28 "Watan" TV news program (Turkmen) gave a short introduction about Commerce Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Paul B. Dyck's visit, giving accurate details on upcoming meetings with government officials. Similar reports on the following day appeared in the state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,991) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 33,391). The same day, government website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (Turkmen, Russian, English) reprinted articles from state dailies. The September 30 "Watan" TV news program continued to highlight DAS Dyck's visit with a short report on the meetings held. Video excerpts showed the envoy having meetings with government officials. On October 9, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried a separate five minute story on the visit. This story mainly highlighted the September 30 press conference with DAS Dyck. The story included generally accurate press conference remarks and some video scenes from other official meetings. Shockingly, one state TV journalist asked several relevant questions during the course of the press conference. Although this journalist had attended previous, similar press conferences, this was the first time that any state journalist took advantage of the opportunity to question a visiting

official.

TURKISH NEWSPAPER OMITTS IFTAR DINNER

¶4. (U) Post conducted an Iftar Dinner on September 24. Media contacts were among the invitees, but were not expected to cover the event. "Zaman-Turkmenistan" (Turkmen), the Turkmen language edition of Turkish "Zaman" newspaper, expressed interest in carrying an article on the event, but did not place it in their weekly edition.

RFE/RL HIGHLIGHT 9/11 COMMEMORATIVE SACRIFICE MEAL

¶5. (U) On September 11, RFE/RL Turkmen language programming accurately carried an interview with PAO, noting that the Embassy hosted a sacrifice meal in honor of the victims of 9/11.

STATE MEDIA COVERAGE OF COLUMBUS DAY MOVIE FESTIVAL

¶6. (U) On October 3, state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" and "Turkmenistan" carried short, accurate articles on the Embassy-organized movie festival "Discover America" which ended on Columbus Day. The articles accurately quoted the Charge d'Affaires on the purpose of the event and gave details about the movies presented. The following day, government website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (Turkmen, Russian, English) reprinted the articles from the state dailies. "Turkmenistan" TV channel highlighted the opening of the movie festival on October 5, carrying an accurate interview with post's Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) and the Charge d'Affaires. Video scenes highlighted a related poster show and the opening movie. On October 10, RFE/RL Turkmen language program

ASHGABAT 00001476 002 OF 002

carried an accurate story on the event, including an interview with the CAO on the festival.

STATE MEDIA HIGHLIGHT MULTIMEDIA INTERNET CENTER OPENING

¶7. (U) On October 15, "Watan" TV news program (Turkmen) carried an accurate story on the opening of a new Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) center. The program praised the importance of the center in developing Turkmen education and carried accurate interview remarks by the USAID Country Representative. On the following day, similar articles appeared on state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" and "Turkmenistan". The government website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" posted an article similar to the state-run dailies' stories. "Miras" TV channel's (Turkmen) October 16 morning and evening programs gave separate, but accurate stories on the event, carrying interview remarks by the USAID Country Director and the Deputy Regional Director of IATP. On October 17, "Turkmenistan" TV channel ran a generally accurate story that included interview remarks by PAO, USAID Country Director, and the IATP Representative. The same day, the Russia-based pro-government website "Turkmenistan.ru" (Russian, English) posted a short article about the event based on the Turkmen State News Service report. (NOTE: State daily articles and TV stories heavily drew from the post-issued press release. END NOTE.) (COMMENT: This particular coverage is significant given that the previous regime had forced the closure of some IATP centers in Turkmenistan. END COMMENT)

STATE TV COVERS U.S. EMBASSY INFORMATION BOOTH AT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

¶5. (U) On October 9 and 11, "Miras" TV channel (Turkmen) gave accurate coverage of the post-organized information booth at Turkmenistan's International Book and Publications exhibition, carrying generally accurate interview remarks by the PAO and a representative of the "Scholastic" book company. On October 10 and 12, "Turkmenistan" TV channel accurately presented the booth, highlighting the story with interview remarks by PAO. The following day, the "Watan" TV news program (Turkmen) accurately showcased the booth with interview remarks by PAO, who emphasized the value of the Embassy's Information Resource Center for public.

STATE DAILIES HIGHLIGHT AFCP AWARD CEREMONY

¶16. (U) On October 16, the state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" and "Turkmenistan" ran an article about the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) award ceremony conducted by the U.S. Embassy. The article accurately described the winning projects and stressed the importance of AFCP in preserving the cultural heritage of Turkmenistan. (NOTE: The article drew heavily from the post-issued press release and handouts. END NOTE.) State "Miras" TV channel (Turkmen) conducted a video recording but, despite continuous promises to carry the story, never aired it.

¶18. (SBU) COMMENT: Post has seen a generally good continuation of contact with state news media, including some signs of individual initiative. For the first time, a "Turkmenistan TV" reporter asked several relevant questions during the press conference with DAS Dyck. However, we also saw that perfectly acceptable material about some of our events was never aired, such as the AFCP program and, most recently, the Embassy election event (reftel). Despite the unusual instances in which journalists were not able to publish their stories, the Public Affairs Section still has frequent and productive contact with state media. END COMMENT.

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